



# HINDSIGHT

## The House that Moses Built Part I

By Jody Morgan

The historical significance of a house cannot be estimated by measuring its exterior dimensions. Three hundred years ago, Duxbury residents did not waste energy and materials constructing buildings with high ceilings and large, open spaces. But very few of the remaining homes from the early 18th century have gone without alteration by succeeding owners. New structures sometimes incorporated an older edifice. Rather than demolish a small house to provide space for a more elegant dwelling, residents often recycled the original building.

The Moses Soule House, circa 1700, now stands on Bay Road. Trees too small to block the view of the Standish Monument from the back windows 45 years ago have reclaimed much of the surrounding land. Moved to its present location by ox cart shortly after the Civil War, the already antique Cape traveled along a track that has long since ceased to be a marked thoroughfare. Two of the three original fireplaces "fell out" en route, according to George C. Weston, the son of the man responsible for carting the house.

Architectural details suggest that the building had been standing for at least a century before it was given this fresh perspective. Boards in the wainscoting bear the feathering marks of hand tools. The widest measures 30 inches. The roof beams are pegged together with trunnels. Rough-hewn beams supporting the flooring exhibit the knots and gnarls where branches were lopped off. Sheathing beneath the exterior shingles runs vertically.

The staircase now ascends straight from the front entrance, but tread marks behind the fireplace wall indicate that earlier inhabitants had to wind their way up to the second floor around the chimney. Patchworked spaces in the wide board flooring intimate that more than the fireplaces may have fallen prey to the move. An odd extra board in the front parlor wall may have been added to shore up a gap created by the ox-cart ride. The name of a forgotten vessel is lettered on a plank laid beneath the plumbing in the first-floor bathroom.

The walls, however, are only able to communicate a few of their secrets. They refuse to explain whose muck-encrusted, handpegged boots were left

under the eaves along with two empty jugs. Fortunately for those of us who want to know more about the people who have lived their lives within those walls during the past three centuries, some of the story can be wrested from town records.

Documenting the history of a house often involves a process similar to rewinding a much-spliced 8-mm home movie. The farther back you go, the less precise the focus. Often the film breaks at a crucial point. Double exposures created by duplicate records with mismatching dates and data obscure the

the property had any connection with their lineage when Ann's parents purchased the place in 1948. They learned about the house's itinerant history directly from George C. Weston. He was a nonagenarian at the time he related to Edwin Noyes the details of the cart ride that brought the Soule home to Bay Road from its original location near the intersection of what is now Depot Street and Prior Farm Road.

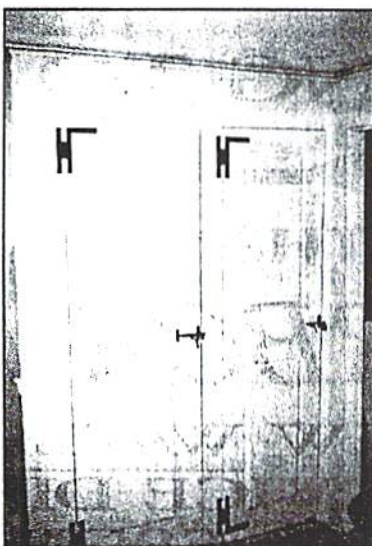
Moses Soule was born about 1669. His mother, Rebecca Simmons, was the daughter of Moses Simmons, who arrived on the Fortune. When she died in 1678, his father, John Soule, remarried. During his declining years, Pilgrim George Soule lived with his son John's family. In 1680, John inherited all of his father's Duxbury property.

Although the births of Moses' siblings were not all recorded, careful examination of probate documents by Mayflower Society genealogists indicates that Moses was one of 10 children. He married Mercy Southworth in 1701 and probably built the house that now bears his name in anticipation of his wedding. In 1707, Duxbury Town Meeting "granted to Moses Soule about Six or Seven acres of land of the town's commons joining to the lot he now dwells on, and empowered Samuel Sprague and John Partridge to lay out said land."

Moses prospered. He purchased land in other towns. He and Mercy had nine children. Mercy died in 1728 at the age of 58. In 1729, Moses, then probably about 60, took a 15-year-old bride, Sarah Chandler. He died in 1748, leaving a personal estate of some 736 pounds, including land holdings as far away as the Maine territory.

Perhaps both his growing family and his growing wealth contributed to Moses Soule's decision to sell his first home to William Sprague. The deed recorded Feb. 17, 1709/10, includes land and dwelling house. The second owner did not prosper. He drowned on a whaling voyage Nov. 25, 1712.

But the history of the simple structure was only beginning when William Sprague's death left his widow, Grace, with a house full of small children, the youngest only 9 months old. Through her careful management of William's modest estate, the family continued to call the house Moses built home for another 19 years.



Revealing a few secrets, one door leads to the basement's display of rough-hewn beams, while the other opens into a bright, compact study.

facts.

The first dateboarding effort for the Moses Soule home reached an apparent end with Jabez Prior, whose father did not bother to record a deed when he transferred the property to Jabez. For a time, owner Ann Noyes believed her house might have been the original Prior farmhouse. Subsequent research led back to a sale of land and dwelling by Moses Soule to William Sprague in 1709/10. Additional evidence suggests that Moses Soule constructed the house sometime around 1700.

Coincidentally, Moses and Ann share a common ancestor, Mayflower passenger and Compact signer George Soule. However, the Noyes family had no idea